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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [CO](#)
SUBJECT: U/S BURNS MEETS WITH HUMAN RIGHTS GROUPS

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Milton K. Drucker
Reason: 1.4 (b,d)

11. (U) October 25, 2006; 8:30 AM.

12. (U) Participants:

U.S.

Under Secretary Burns
A/S for WHA Thomas P. Shannon
USAID Deputy Assistant Administrator Mark Silverman
Deputy Assistant Attorney General Mary Lee Warren
Ambassador William B. Wood
USAID Mission Director Liliana Ayalde
Attorney Adviser, L, Patricia Prugh
P Staff Assistant Heidi Bronke
Daniel Tomlinson, NSC
Political Counselor John Creamer
Political Officer Kevin Murakami (notetaker)

NGOS AND INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

Gloria Florez, MINGA
Barbara Hintermann, International Committee of the Red Cross
(ICRC)
Fernando Calado, International Organization for Migration
(IOM)
Marco Romero, CODHES
Gustavo Gallon, Comision Colombiana de Juristas (CCJ)
Mario Gomez, Fundacion Restrepo Barco
Alvaro Villarraga, Fundacion Cultura Democratica
Luis Evelis Andrade, Organizacion Nacional de Indigenas de
Colombia (ONIC)
Victoria Eugenia Giraldo, Fundacion Esperanza

Summary

13. (C) In a cordial, 90 minute meeting, Under Secretary Burns thanked human rights group for their valuable work in Colombia, stressed the importance of human rights in our dialogue with the GOC, and heard their concerns about paramilitary demobilization and the Justice and Peace Law. Several participants condemned the GOC's human rights record, noting that extra-judicial killings and impunity remained widespread. Others acknowledged continuing problems, but praised GOC progress on improving security and noted the military's increased willingness to discuss human rights

issues. Other topics included internally displaced persons, indigenous rights, and the possibility of peace talks with the FARC. All participants voiced appreciation for the U.S. role in encouraging a broad-based human rights dialogue in Colombia. End Summary.

Mixed Opinions of Uribe's Human Rights Record

¶4. (C) Human rights groups gave President Uribe's human rights record mixed reviews. ICRC's Barbara Hintermann said the ICRC's dialogue with COLMIL leadership had significantly improved. She also said the GOC committed fewer violations of international humanitarian law than in the past. Fundacion Restrepo Barco's Mario Gomez praised GOC progress on security and social issues, citing increased state presence, a fall in violence indicators, and greater access to education. CCJ's Gustavo Gallon noted that as a result of the paramilitary peace process, paramilitary killings were down from 1,700 a year to 1,000. Still, Gallon said the GOC's overall human rights record is poor. He said that during President Uribe's tenure, extrajudicial killings had risen from 120 a year to 250 a year. Moreover, political violence produced over 3000 deaths since 2002, 75% of which were attributable to the paramilitaries or the GOC. Gallon criticized the human rights certification process, complaining that political considerations appeared to influence certification decisions. CODHES' Marco Romero criticized the GOC's "informant network," explaining that a lack of oversight by the Inspector General, Human Rights Ombudsman, and civil society had led to "massive" numbers of arbitrary detentions. Fundacion Esperanza's Victoria Giraldo said the GOC should do more to protect victims of trafficking in persons.

¶5. (C) U/S Burns said the U.S. supported the GOC, but understood the need for further GOC progress on human rights. The U.S. would continue to push the GOC to investigate allegations of human rights violations and to punish the perpetrators. U/S Burns praised the work of the NGO community, stating, "We know you work under pressure and intimidation, and we value your efforts." Ambassador Wood also highlighted U.S. support for NGOs' critical role in identifying human rights abuses and in pushing for improvements in Colombia's human rights situation.

New Paramilitary Groups?

¶6. (C) The NGOs expressed concerns over paramilitary recidivism and continuing paramilitary political influence. Minga's Gloria Florez said many demobilized paramilitaries were still operating, only under different names. Florez singled out Putumayo as especially worrisome, alleging that paramilitaries from the Bloque Central Bolivar were still active. She said paramilitaries controlled the communities of Puerto Asis and Puerto Vega in Putumayo, and complained that the GOC was not doing anything to address the problem. ICRC's Hintermann voiced concern about the emergence of new groups, noting that some have sophisticated command structures. Florez also criticized paramilitary influence over politicians and institutions on the Atlantic Coast, highlighting Sucre Department. "This influence puts Colombian democracy and rule of law at risk," she charged.

Justice and Peace Law

¶7. (C) Reaction to the Justice and Peace Law (J&P) was mixed. IOM's Fernando Calado said the J&P law was "positive" because it provided victims and communities a voice. He praised the GOC for "taking full responsibility for this process from the start" rather than relying on international donors. Calado said reinsertion is the next challenge. ONIC's Luis Andrade criticized the J&P law, claiming many paramilitary leaders would escape punishment. He stressed

the importance of returning land taken by paramilitaries to rightful owners, especially the indigenous. CCJ's Gallon criticized the J&P's initial draft implementing decree, saying it was a GOC effort to circumvent the Constitutional Court ruling on the law. He thanked Ambassador Wood for his criticism of the draft, which the GOC later revised to better track the Court's ruling. U/S Burns said the U.S. supported demobilization efforts but recognized there were contradictions in the law.

FARC Peace Process?

¶8. (C) The human rights groups expressed support for peace talks with the FARC. Fundacion Cultura Democratica's Alvaro Villarraga claimed there was a public expectation President Uribe would pursue a peace policy during his second term. Villarraga complained, however, that President Uribe had not convened the National Peace Council, as required by law, in over a year and a half. Fundacion Restrepo Barco's Gomez also supported GOC-FARC talks, in spite of last week's car bomb inside a Bogota military installation. Gomez called the act an "impediment" to possible peace talks, but insisted the GOC should continue pursuing such talks. ONIC's Andrade urged the GOC to agree on a humanitarian accord with FARC.

Internally Displaced Persons

¶9. (C) CODHES' Romero and ICRC's Hintermann said the plight of internally displaced persons (IDPs) was one of Colombia's gravest human rights problems. Hintermann said the challenge was to find a long term solution to the problem. Romero claimed CODHES recorded 300,000 new IDPs each year, but acknowledged that GOC figures were much lower. He said the majority of displacement was caused by paramilitaries but also blamed the FARC especially in rural areas. Romero said displacements were especially high in combat areas, highlighting Narino Department as a "laboratory of war" where conflict between the military, narco-traffickers, paramilitaries, and FARC have prompted a sharp spike in IDP numbers. Romero also blamed poverty for causing displacement, saying 82 percent of the country's 12 million peasants lived in poverty. "If you don't provide economic opportunities for peasants, the military and security policy is useless," he said.

Indigenous Rights

¶10. (C) ONIC's Andrade blamed human rights problems affecting indigenous communities on the armed conflict and lack of economic opportunities. Andrade said indigenous peoples were victimized by all sides in the conflict, explaining that the strategic location of indigenous lands made them targets. He alleged that the military often accused indigenous people of being FARC collaborators, in spite of the fact that the FARC also targeted indigenous communities. He highlighted Choco Department as an area where indigenous communities were continually "under fire" from military, paramilitaries, and the FARC. Andrade also criticized aerial fumigation of illegal crops, claiming it caused severe environmental and health problems in indigenous communities. He said impunity for crimes against indigenous peoples was also a problem. He explained that paramilitaries had killed several indigenous people in Tierra Alta, Cordoba, but no one had been brought to justice. "We believe that to strengthen democracy, we need to improve the justice system," Andrade said.

¶11. (U) This cable has been cleared by U/S Burns.
DRUCKER